United Nations S/2003/728

Security Council

Distr.: General
23 July 2003

Original: English

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon

(for the period from 15 January 2003 to 23 July 2003)

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 1461 (2003) of 30 January 2003, by which the Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) for a further period of six months, until 31 July 2003. It covers developments since my previous report, dated 14 January 2003 (S/2003/38).

II. Situation in the area of operation

2. The situation in the area of operation of UNIFIL remained generally quiet but tense through a reporting period marked by regional conflict. The most significant sources of tension were the persistent Israeli violations of Lebanese airspace and instances of Hizbollah anti-aircraft fire directed across the Blue Line towards Israeli villages. There were no violent exchanges in the Shab'a farms area after the January incident reported to the Council the week prior to the last mandate renewal. Minor ground violations of the Blue Line by Lebanese shepherds took place on a routine basis, while other ground violations were rare. UNIFIL recorded only a few violations by Lebanese vehicles and one ground violation from the Israeli side.

3. Israeli air incursions into Lebanon increased overall during the reporting period, though the numbers have declined since early July. UNIFIL recorded almost daily violations across the Blue Line in some weeks. As in the past, many Israeli overflights penetrated deep into Lebanon, often generating sonic booms over populated areas. The pattern identified in my previous reports continued, whereby some aircraft would fly out to sea and enter Lebanese airspace north of the UNIFIL area of operation, thus avoiding direct observation and verification by UNIFIL. These overflights are widely observed by civilians, United Nations personnel and other members of the international community, and reported to UNIFIL by the Lebanese authorities. Israeli air incursions continued despite frequent calls by United Nations officials and a number of concerned Member States that Israel cease these violations.

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4. Hizbollah continued to respond to the air incursions with anti-aircraft fire, often immediately but at times with a considerable delay. On several occasions, UNIFIL recorded Hizbollah fire that was not preceded by Israeli overflights in its area of operation. There were two incidents where anti-aircraft rounds landed in Qiryat Shemona and one in Even Menahem, causing serious damage to civilian structures but no casualties, and several instances of debris falling on to the Israeli side of the line. On 28 April, shrapnel from anti-aircraft fire caused minor damage to a UNIFIL post. My representatives in the region and I stressed repeatedly to the Lebanese authorities that Hizbollah's anti-aircraft fire across the Blue Line constitutes a violation.

5. The breach of the ceasefire in the Shab'a farms area occurred on 21 January when Hizbollah fired 56 mortar rounds at an Israel Defense Forces position south-east of Kafr Shuba. The Israel Defense Forces retaliated with artillery and mortar fire and two aerial bombs directed at the area from which the Hizbollah fire had emanated. One Lebanese civilian was killed and at least two others injured by the Israel Defense Forces fire.

6. Demonstrators on the Lebanese side of the Blue Line again gathered periodically at the points of friction identified in my previous reports, Sheikh Abbad Hill east of Hula, and Fatima gate west of Metulla, to throw stones and other objects towards Israeli positions across the line. UNIFIL intervened at times to prevent crowds from approaching the line in a provocative manner. On one occasion, a group of individuals picked up three mines from a field and threw them across the line, one exploding on the technical fence. There was one infiltration attempt by a Lebanese individual across the Blue Line into Israel during the reporting period. This individual was apprehended by the Israel Defense Forces and subsequently turned over to the Lebanese authorities through UNIFIL.

7. The Lebanese Joint Security Forces and the Lebanese Army continued to operate in the areas vacated by Israel. Apparently the strength of the Joint Security Forces was not augmented but their activities increased and they maintained a more visible presence, including along the Blue Line. This was particularly notable during the period when regional tension was at its highest, at which time the Lebanese Army constructed a series of obstacles along the line to block access to it. Commendable measures were taken and restraint shown by parties on both sides of the line to maintain calm in southern Lebanon during the wider regional crisis.

8. Nevertheless, the Government of Lebanon continued to maintain the position that, so long as there is no comprehensive peace with Israel, the Lebanese armed forces will not be deployed along the Blue Line. Hizbollah maintained its visible presence near the line and reinforced some positions. Hizbollah also increased the number of anti-aircraft guns deployed in the area, one of which was placed in close proximity to UNIFIL position 8-32 for several months. Numerous protests by UNIFIL resulted in the recent removal of the gun. Hizbollah interference with the freedom of movement of UNIFIL during the reporting period was negligible.

9. Official local governing structures were noted to be extending their authority throughout the south at a steady pace. Communications, infrastructure, health and welfare systems as well as postal services continued their slow progress towards integration with the rest of the country.

10. UNIFIL provided assistance to the civilian population in the form of medical care, water projects, equipment or services for schools and orphanages, and supplies of social services to the needy. UNIFIL assistance was provided from resources primarily made available by troop-contributing countries. UNIFIL cooperated closely on humanitarian matters with the Lebanese authorities, United Nations agencies, in particular the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the International Committee of the Red Cross and other organizations and agencies operating in Lebanon.

11. The presence of a large number of minefields in the UNIFIL area of operation, now largely concentrated along the Blue Line as a result of demining in the other sectors, remained a matter of serious concern. Since January, one Lebanese civilian was injured as a result of exploding mines and ordnance, while one Lebanese soldier died and one member of a commercial demining team was injured during mine-clearing operations.

12. In southern Lebanon as a whole, collaboration between the United Nations, the Government of Lebanon and various donors has made possible dramatic progress in demining efforts. Well ahead of schedule, the Operation Emirates Solidarity project has cleared over 4 million m^2 and over 33,000 anti-personnel mines, some 1,500 anti-tank mines and 1,700 pieces of unexploded ordnance. A demining project funded by the Government of Greece was initiated in the Nabatieh area. The Lebanese Army engineer regiment has been clearing areas along the Blue Line in the vicinity of Markabe and Abbasieh. The United Nations continued to coordinate international assistance to the Government of Lebanon through my Personal Representative and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). With the successes in demining, advocacy efforts began emphasizing socio-economic needs to rehabilitate formerly mine-affected areas. Appeals were launched in the context of the International Support Group, and the "trees instead of mines" initiative has led to some 30,000 trees being planted in six villages to date.

13. My Personal Representative continued to work in close collaboration with UNDP and the World Bank to facilitate the funding and implementation of development projects in the south by privately and publicly advocating the needs of the area. UNDP continued to lead the efforts of the United Nations system in working with the Lebanese authorities for the development and rehabilitation of the south.

III. Organizational matters

14. UNIFIL remained focused on maintaining the ceasefire through mobile and air patrols along the Blue Line, observation from fixed positions, and close contact with the parties, the latter with a view to correcting violations, resolving incidents and preventing escalation. The United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO), through Observer Group Lebanon, supported UNIFIL in the fulfilment of its mandate.

15. As at 30 June 2003, UNIFIL comprised 1,990 troops from France (204), Ghana (648), India (649), Ireland (7), Italy (51), Poland (237) and Ukraine (194). UNIFIL was assisted in its tasks by 51 military observers of UNTSO. A map showing the current deployment of UNIFIL is attached. In addition, UNIFIL employed 416

civilian staff, of whom 114 were recruited internationally and 302 locally. Major General Lalit Tewari continued as Force Commander. Staffan de Mistura continued to act as my Personal Representative for Southern Lebanon.

16. There were no fatalities in UNIFIL during the reporting period. Since the establishment of UNIFIL 242 members of the Force have lost their lives, 78 as a result of firings or bomb explosions, 103 as a result of accidents and 61 from other causes. Firing or mine explosions wounded a total of 344.

IV. Financial aspects

17. By its resolution 57/325 of 18 June 2003, the General Assembly appropriated the amount of $94.1 million gross, equivalent to a monthly rate of $7.8 million gross, for the maintenance of the Force for the period from 1 July 2003 to 30 June 2004. Should the Council decide to extend the mandate of UNIFIL beyond 31 July 2003, as recommended in paragraph 25 below, the cost of its maintenance would be limited to the monthly rate approved by the General Assembly.

18. As at 30 June 2003, unpaid assessments to the special account for UNIFIL for the period since its inception to 31 July 2003 amounted to $85.4 million. The total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations at that date amounted to $1,108.6 million.

V. Observations

19. The UNIFIL area of operation has continued generally calm since my previous report. Against the background of the heightened tension in the wider region, the parties have by and large exercised restraint, living up to their stated intentions to avoid escalation. Almost six months have passed since the last violent exchange across the Blue Line, the longest period of relative calm since Israel withdrew from Lebanon more than three years ago after 22 years of occupation. An additional indicator of stabilization in southern Lebanon has been the success of demining efforts. These are encouraging trends.

20. Nevertheless, tension between Israel and Lebanon remains high and the relative calm along the Blue Line is an uneasy one. The violation of the Blue Line in the Shab'a farms in January, a grave breach of the ceasefire, is emblematic of the tension still prevailing. Furthermore, the provocative air violations by Israel not only intimidate the civilian population of Lebanon but they are at variance with Israel's otherwise full compliance with Security Council resolution 425 (1978). Hizbollah's firing of anti-aircraft weapons across the Blue Line into populated northern Israeli villages is a violation and puts Lebanese and Israeli citizens, as well as UNIFIL personnel, at risk. Both the air incursions and the live fire violations carry substantial potential for escalation. I must again stress the need for all parties concerned to respect fully the withdrawal line identified by the United Nations, as repeatedly called for by the Security Council, to cease all violations of the line and to refrain from any action that could serve to destabilize the situation on the ground.

21. The Government of Lebanon demonstrated its capacity to increase its authority throughout southern Lebanon, particularly through the activities of the Joint Security Forces and the Lebanese Army during this period of heightened tension in

the wider region. Consistent with Security Council resolution 425 (1978), Lebanon should continue to deploy its armed forces in order to extend its control over the south. I reiterate the Security Council's call for the Government of Lebanon to continue with the measures it has taken thus far and to do its utmost to encourage a calm environment throughout the south.

22. I note that the relative improvement in terms of security in southern Lebanon coupled with the achievements in demining point to the need for an increased focus on the economic development of the south. In this respect, I urge both the Government of Lebanon and international donors to redouble their rehabilitation efforts.

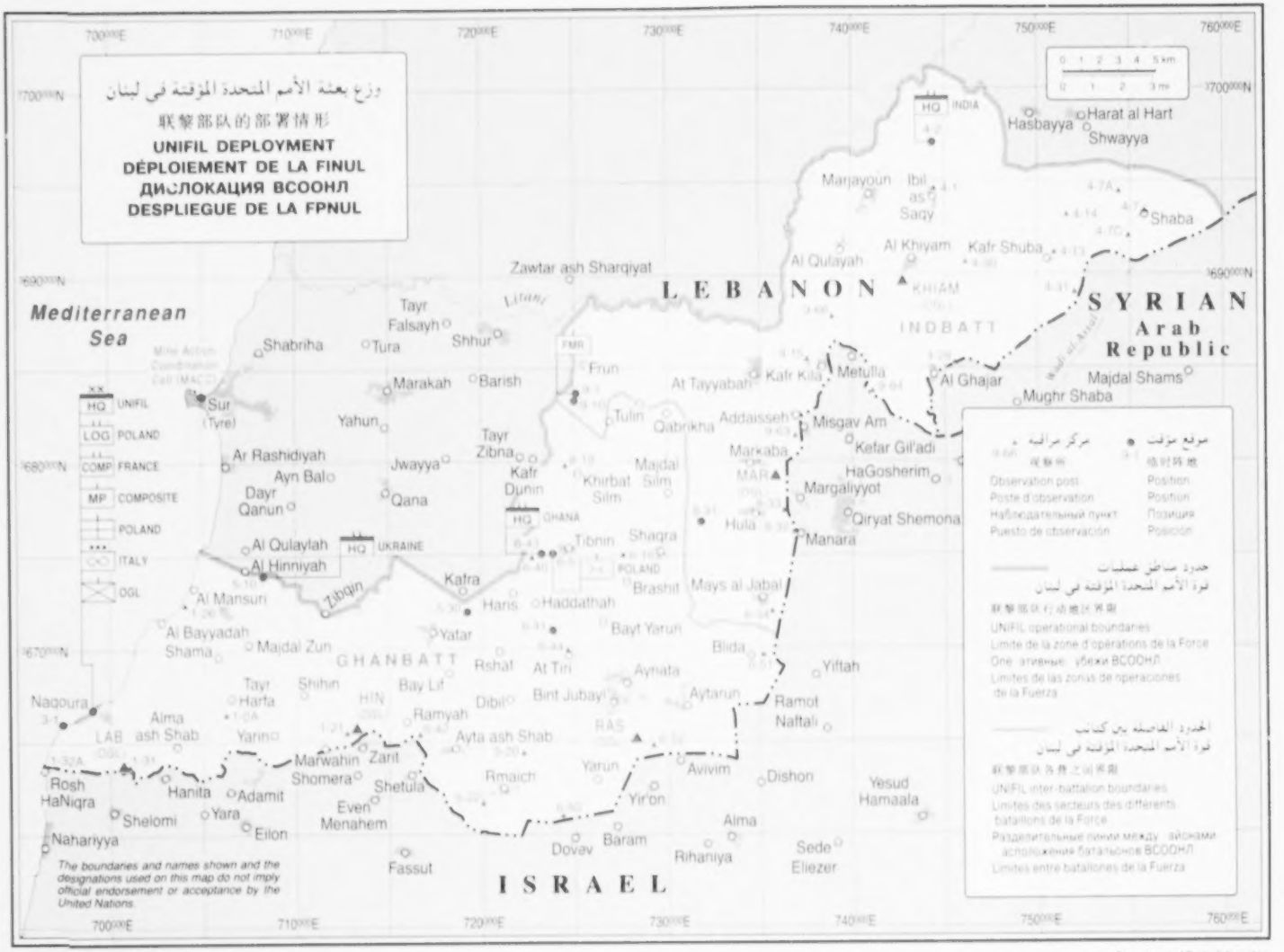
23. UNIFIL will continue to contribute to the restoration of international peace and security through observing, monitoring and reporting on developments in its area of operation, liaising with the parties to maintain calm. My Personal Representative will continue, in close consultation with the Special Coordinator, to lend the political and diplomatic support of the United Nations to the parties to establish lasting peace and security in southern Lebanon.

24. The situation along the Blue Line, although generally quiet, is nevertheless susceptible to volatile regional developments, and as such underlines the need to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East, based on all the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, including resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002).

25. In a letter dated 2 July 2003 (S/2003/685), the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Lebanon to the United Nations conveyed to me his Government's request that the Security Council extend the mandate of UNIFIL for a further period of six months. In the light of conditions prevailing in the area, I recommend that the Security Council extend the mandate of UNIFIL until 31 January 2004.

26. I must again draw attention to the serious shortfall in the funding of the Force. At present, unpaid assessments amount to $85.4 million. Eventually this represents money owed to the Member States contributing the troops that make up the Force. I appeal to all Member States to pay their assessments promptly and in full and to clear all remaining arrears. I should like to express my gratitude to the Governments contributing troops to the Force for their understanding and patience.

27. In conclusion, I wish to express my appreciation to my Personal Representative, Staffan de Mistura, the Special Coordinator, Terje Roed-Larsen, and to pay tribute to Major General Lalit Mohan Tewari and the men and women of UNIFIL for the manner in which they have carried out their tasks. Their discipline and bearing have been of a high order, reflecting credit on themselves and the United Nations.



Map No. 4144 Rev. 7 UNITED NATIONS
July 2003

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